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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 DHAKA 006044

SIPDIS

JUSTICE FOR OIA, AFMLS AND NDDS,
TREASURY FOR FINCEN
DEA FOR OILS AND OFFICE OF DIVERSION CONTROL
STATE FOR INL, SA
NEW DEHLI FOR DEA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: SNAR BG
SUBJECT: BANGLADESH INCSR DRAFT - PART I

REF: STATE 209558

Bangladesh

I. Summary

Because of its geographic location in the midst of major drug producing and exporting countries, Bangladesh is used by trafficking organizations as a transit point. Seizures of heroin, phensidyl (a codeine-based, highly addictive cough syrup produced in India), and pathidine (an injectable opiate with medical application as an anesthesia) point to growing narcotics abuse in Bangladesh. Phensidyl is popular because of its low price and widespread availability. While unconfirmed reports circulate of opium and cannabis cultivation along the border with Burma and cannabis cultivation in the southern delta region, there is no evidence that Bangladesh is a significant producer or exporter of narcotics. The Bangladesh government (BDG) officials charged with controlling and preventing illegal substance trafficking lack training, equipment, continuity of leadership and other resources to detect and interdict the flow of drugs. Moreover, there is minimal coordination among these agencies. Corruption at all levels of government, and in particular law enforcement, hampers the country's drug interdiction efforts. Bangladesh is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

II. Status of Country

There are unsubstantiated allegations of opium and cannabis production in the Bandarban District along the Burmese border and cannabis production in the southern silt-island ("char") region. The country's porous borders make Bangladesh an attractive transfer point for drugs transiting the region. There are no reports of production, trading or transit of precursor chemicals in Bangladesh.

III. Country Actions Against Drugs in 2004

Policy Initiatives. The Department of Narcotics Control's (DNC) counternarcotics policy initiatives and program activities are seriously hampered by the ineffectiveness of the National Narcotics Control Board (NNCB), the highest governmental body, to fulfill the objectives of the Narcotics Control Act (NCA). Article 5 of the NCA directs the Board to formulate policies and monitor the production, supply, and use of illegal drugs in Bangladesh. The 19-member NNCB, made of up of 11 ministers, seven appointed members, and the DNC Director General, is charged to meet quarterly: but only a single meeting was held in 2005, the first since 2003. There is still no master plan for combating drug trafficking and abuse in Bangladesh.

The BDG and USG signed a Letter of Agreement (LOA) in September 2002 to provide equipment and forensic technical assistance to the DNC and its central chemical laboratory. This training and technical assistance is complete. The LOA also provided for training, via the U.S. DOJ, to law enforcement personnel involved in counternarcotics activities. An amendment to the LOA for an increase in funds for training and equipment was signed in 2004.

Accomplishments. The Department of Narcotics Control is the BDG agency most responsible for counternarcotics efforts in Bangladesh. It is housed within the Ministry of Home Affairs and is currently under the leadership of an acting Director General who has been in office for less than a year. The organization is chronically under-funded, understaffed, under-trained, and suffers from frequent personnel turnover. The BDG completed construction of the first drug treatment and rehabilitation facility, a 250 bed hospital funded entirely by the BDG. A 2005 law introduced quality of care requirements governing staffing and facilities for addiction treatment centers. The BDG also targeted demand reduction, increasing anti-drug public service messages.

Law Enforcement Efforts. Law enforcement units engaged in counternarcotics operations include the police, the DNC, the border defense forces known as the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), customs, the navy, the coast guard, and local magistrates.

Although there are only 19 legal land border crossings, Bangladesh's borders are generally considered porous. Elements of the BDR, responsible for land border security within twelve-miles of the border, are widely believed to abet the smuggling of goods, including narcotics, into Bangladesh. Customs, the navy, the coast guard and the DNC are under-funded, poorly equipped and staffed, and lack training. Customs officials also lack arrest authority. At ports of entry where customs officials are not stationed with police units, they have no capacity to detain suspected traffickers. Instead, they can only retain the contraband items found. There is no DNC presence at the country's second largest airport, in Chittagong, which has direct flights to Burma and Thailand. To date, no random searches of crews, ships, boats, vehicles, or containers are being performed at the country's largest seaport in Chittagong. These obstacles significantly undermine overall BDG counternarcotics efforts.

The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), established in 2004, targets organized criminal activity, including narcotics offenses. Increased narcotics seizures, principally attributed to the RAB, have resulted in higher street prices for popular opiates like phensidyl and pethidine. Seizures in 2005 included 3,000 bottles of phensidyl.

There is no centralized record of narcotics seizures by law enforcement agencies. The most current figures available are compiled by the Criminal Investigation Division (CID). These records vary significantly from the DNC data included in the 2005 report. These data indicate that drug quantities seized by Bangladesh authorities from January through July 2005 are as follows: 36.8 kilograms of heroin (seizures for the entire year of 2004, according to the CID were at 43.4 kilograms); 3322.6 kilograms of marijuana (3514.4 kg seized during all of 2004); 7387.5 liters of phensidyl (6342.3 liters seized during all of 2004); and 1902 ampules of pethidine injection (5976 ampules seized during all of 2004). It is important to note that these statistics do not reflect all seizures made by all agencies in Bangladesh, as evidenced by the comparison to DNC data last year. Post, however, believes them to be reflective of general trends in Bangladesh.

Corruption. Corruption is endemic at all levels of society and government in Bangladesh. Authorities involved in jobs that have an affect on the drug trade facilitate the smuggling of narcotics. Corrupt officials can be found throughout the chain of command. If caught, prosecuted, and convicted, most officials receive a reprimand at best and termination from government service at worst. Adjudicating authorities do not take these cases seriously.

An Anti-Corruption Commission was officially formed in November 2004 with a mandate to investigate corruption and file cases against government officials. The ACC has been hampered by disputes over staffing and organization and has yet to operate effectively or demonstrate the ability to act independently. The BDG does not, as a matter of government policy, encourage or facilitate illicit production or distribution of drugs or controlled substances or launder proceeds from their transactions. No senior official has been identified as engaging in, encouraging, or facilitating the production or distribution of drugs or controlled substances.

Agreements and Treaties. Bangladesh is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention. It has a memorandum of understanding on narcotics cooperation with Iran, an extradition treaty with Thailand, and it participates in information sharing with the government of Burma. It is a signatory to the 1990 SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. It is negotiating a bilateral agreement with India.

Cultivation/Production. The DNC strongly denies unsubstantiated reports from several NGO and local government officials that opium production takes place in the Bandarban district along the border with Burma. The DNC reports, however, that it has destroyed a few "small" poppy crops in the hill tracts near Chittagong and in the northwest it says were cultivated for seeds cooking spices for local consumption. The DNC also reports limited amounts of cannabis are cultivated for local consumption in the hill tracts, in the southern silt islands, and in the northeastern region. The DNC, working with law enforcement agencies, reportedly destroys any cannabis crops it discovers.

Drug Flow/Transit. Bangladesh is situated between the Golden Crescent to the west and the Golden Triangle to the east. Porous borders, weak law enforcement institutions, and corruption leave Bangladesh vulnerable to smuggling of opium based pharmaceuticals and other medicinal drugs from India and white heroin from Burma.

Domestic Programs (Demand Reduction). There is no consensus estimate of the number of drug addicts in Bangladesh. A recent DNC study estimated the addict population at two million and growing. Other BDG estimates put the figure as low as 250,000. The total number of drug cases and accused drug offenders doubled between 1999 and 2001 and continues to

rise. Media and anecdotal reports suggest that drug abuse, while previously a problem among the ultra-poor, is becoming a major problem among the wealthy and well-educated young, and increasingly among educated, well-off young women, some of whom are turning to prostitution to support their habits. The BDG sponsors rudimentary educational programs aimed at youth in schools and mosques, and has modestly increased funding for these programs in 2005, although there is no clear indication of their impact. NGOs have expressed concerns about the quality of these messages.

The BDG currently runs outpatient and detoxification centers in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, and Rajshahi. These are not treatment centers and thus have limited success addressing the underlying addiction. The BDG opened the first 250 bed drug treatment and rehabilitation facility in 2005. There are other, non-governmental centers with a variety of treatment therapies available. Unfortunately, most of these are quite expensive by Bangladeshi standards and therefore beyond the reach of most drug addicts. There is, however, a drug addicts' rehabilitation organization, APON, that operates five long-term residential rehabilitation centers, including the first center in Bangladesh for the rehabilitation of female drug-users, which opened in 2005. These are the only such facilities in Bangladesh,

IV. U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs

Policy Initiatives. The USG continues to support Bangladesh's counternarcotics efforts through various commodities and training assistance programs. Pursuant to the 2002 U.S. LOA, equipment and law enforcement courses were provided in 2005, primarily to the police, but also to DNC laboratory technicians and officers, and members of the BDR. U.S. technical assistance in 2005 identified significant management issues at a DNC lab, which the DNC has addressed. Other initiatives under consideration include the modernization of law enforcement training facilities in Bangladesh and further development of anticorruption programs within the government.

The Road Ahead. The USG will continue to provide law enforcement and forensic training for BDG officials and work with the BDG to construct a comprehensive strategic plan to develop, professionalize, and institutionalize Bangladesh counternarcotics efforts. This will include working with the BDG to stem drug trafficking before it reaches Bangladesh, primarily by improving maritime security but also by improving land border patrolling.

CHAMMAS